



ATF News

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ATF, ICE SPECIAL AGENTS ARREST THREE MEN, SEIZE 24 WEAPONS

Joint Investigation Reveals Arms Traffickers Smuggled Weapons into Mexico

EL PASO, Texas — Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) special agents and agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested a local man and two Mexican Nationals March 19 and 20 suspected of conspiring to smuggle various firearms into Mexico.

ATF and ICE special agents arrested John Avelar, 32, a naturalized U.S. citizen, at his El Paso home. Jonatan Lopez-Gutierrez, 32, and Jose Amador-Villalpando, 50, both of Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, were arrested at the Stanton Street Bridge before they entered Mexico. Federal agents found several assault-type firearms concealed in roofing materials in the back of the van Lopez-Gutierrez intended to drive back into Mexico.

The eight-month joint investigation resulted in 24 weapons seized, including; a semi-automatic .50-caliber firearm, A-15 .223 caliber semi-automatic assault rifles, a 12-gauge shotgun, and 308-caliber sniper rifles; along with handguns: a 9mm, and .45-, .22- and .40-caliber semi-automatic pistols. The investigation revealed that Avelar purchased the weapons from gun shops, gun shows and the internet. The investigation is ongoing.

ATF Acting Special Agent in Charge Michael A. Golson Sr., said, "This is an example of the type of cases ATF is working in order to prevent firearms from being smuggled into Mexico and to alleviate violence on both sides of the border. This investigation exemplifies the benefits of working together in a partnership. It further shows the cooperative efforts between ATF, ICE and Mexican law enforcement officials. We will continue to work with them, as well as other agencies to combat this problem."

"Buying such weapons from legitimate sources is perfectly legal," said David F. Fry, deputy special agent in charge of ICE Office of Investigations in El Paso. "However, it's illegal to purchase firearms and then sell them to non-immigrants in the

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United States who intend to smuggle them out of the country.”

Avelar is charged with making false statements on an ATF federal application form, which is a firearms violation. He is also charged with conspiracy to smuggle goods out of the United States, which is a Patriot Act violation.

Lopez-Gutierrez and Amador-Villalpando are charged with smuggling goods out of the United States and conspiracy to make false statements on an ATF federal application form. The two men also face additional charges regarding non-immigrants illegally possessing firearms.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Richard Mesa on Friday ordered all three men held without bond during their initial appearance in federal court. The men remain in U.S. Marshals custody at the El Paso County Detention Facility awaiting trial.

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